

# twitter and political consciousness

## An analysis of social media engagement based on political framing

### INTRODUCTION

Print is not dead, it has just been reincarnated. Last year, a Pew Research Study found that nearly one-third of the respondents (31%) have deserted a news outlet because it no longer provides the news and information they had grown accustomed to. The same study found that non-traditional media has become more adept at pushing content to consumers. People are abandoning traditional news sources and moving to mobile digital news sources like social media to provide them with the news (Pew Research Center, 2013).

One of the largest and fastest growing social media sites is Twitter. In the last two years, Twitter has grown from 56 million active users (Golijan, 2013) to 200 million active users, with 60% of active users logging in through mobile devices. Investors are eagerly awaited their chance to get their own slice of Twitter's IPO (McGrath, 2013). Twitter even has a silver bullet in the form of cutting edge software that will allow advertisers to bid for ads directly related to what users are talking about in real time (Herrman, 2013).

With the anonymity and vastness of the Internet, it has become increasingly difficult to separate trustworthy news sources from an agenda-driven persuasion piece. This raises the question: **how much does political alignment play a part in the popularity of content on social media?**

### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This study will analyze the traction of entries (or tweets) on the micro-blogging site Twitter based on political framing. We will achieve this by creating three Twitter accounts mimicking three major news organizations. Traction will be determined by monitoring Retweets, Favorites, Mentions and re-use of URLs on Twitter by followers. This information should show whether a political bias can be used as a tool in social media propagation.

**AUTHOR – Jonathan Crabtree**  
**SPONSOR – Dr. Lauren Birch**  
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### PHASE ONE

**Accounts chosen and discovery.** In order to determine politically charged phrasings, we will analyze Twitter feeds and follower mentions of three established news networks. We will examine the most commonly occurring phrases of Retweeted, Favorited, and Mentioned tweets of select Twitter accounts. Each feed will represent either a more conservative, a more liberal, or more neutral bias.

**These three Twitter accounts chosen were chosen:**

Conservative



@FOXNews

Neutral



@CNN

Liberal



@msnbc

Fox News Channel was chosen due to numerous citations of conservative bias (Vamburkar) (Merritt), MSNBC was chosen for advertising as having a liberal bias (Huffington Post, 2013), and CNN for being considered the most neutral by the most viewers (Cummings).

Initial collection will occur over a three month period, with monitoring and analysis continuing through Phase Three.

### PHASE TWO

**Initial analysis of collected data.** From the data collected in Phase One, three test accounts will be created, mimicking each stance (conservative, liberal, or neutral).

In order to attract followers, accounts will be automated to systematically follow users based on a keyword search. The keywords will be based on the phrases discovered in Phase One. If an account does not follow back within the determined period, the account will be automatically unfollowed and another account will be followed based on a more current selection from the ongoing analysis from the Phase One data. The Phase One data will also be used as an example to create a tone and framing for each test account. Systematic following/unfollowing (also referred to as "churning") will continue through the duration of Phase Three.

### PHASE TWO FINDINGS

Here are the findings from the entries studied

FOX News entry feed

- Was between 43 – 58% more likely to identify itself within the body of entries.
- Preferred to refer to the leader of the United States as simply "Obama" in 8% of entries, as opposed to the MSNBC feed's more complete "President Obama" in almost 7%.
- 6.2% of entries included a violent term such as "shooting," "attack," "crash," or "war," etc. (No noticeable occurrence was found in other feeds.)

CNN entry feed

- Covered a more diverse variety of topics than both other feeds.
- Discussed more cultural topics, mentioning "Christmas" 230% more often than FOX News, while the MSNBC feed didn't mention the holiday in any of our recorded data.

MSNBC entry feed

- Mentioned MSNBC pundit Martin Bashir in 12% of entries (14% more often than President Obama)
- Mentioned Iran in only 1% of entries, while the other feeds mentioned Iran in 10 – 11% of entries.
- Consistently referred to the Republican party as the "GOP" and mentioned them in 8% of entries.
- More likely to use the initials "A.C.A." in referring to U.S. Universal Healthcare than other feeds(as opposed to "Obamacare")
- 6.5% of entries included a social label term such as "racist," "white," "black," or "gay," etc. (No noticeable occurrence was found in other feeds.)

### PHASE THREE

**Data collection.** In this period, tweets will be sent out at regular intervals (for example, 8:00 AM, 2:00 PM, and 8:00 PM) from all three accounts. Tweets from each bias will be manipulated to cater to a political alignment, with one account being an unedited control mimicking a neutral tone and having no manipulation of headlines. Sources for articles and subjects of tweets will be gathered from wire services such as Associate Press or Reuters. Tweets will be composed with as current data as possible, based on ongoing Tweet Archivist analysis. Accounts will be monitored for Retweets, Favorites, Mentions and also re-use and click-throughs of customized URLs.

### PHASE THREE EXAMPLES

@NewsNeutrality The President lashes out at Republican efforts to restrict voting.

April 13, 2:00pm via Hootsuite

@NewsRepublica – *Obama attacks* Republican efforts to restrict voting.

April 13, 2:00pm via Hootsuite

@ProgressNewsNow – *President Obama* lashes out at *GOP* efforts to restrict voting.

April 13, 2:00pm via Hootsuite